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Nostalgia Marketing: An Integrative Framework

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of Arts

In

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Thesis Advisor:

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Portland State University

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Nostalgia Marketing: An Integrative Framework

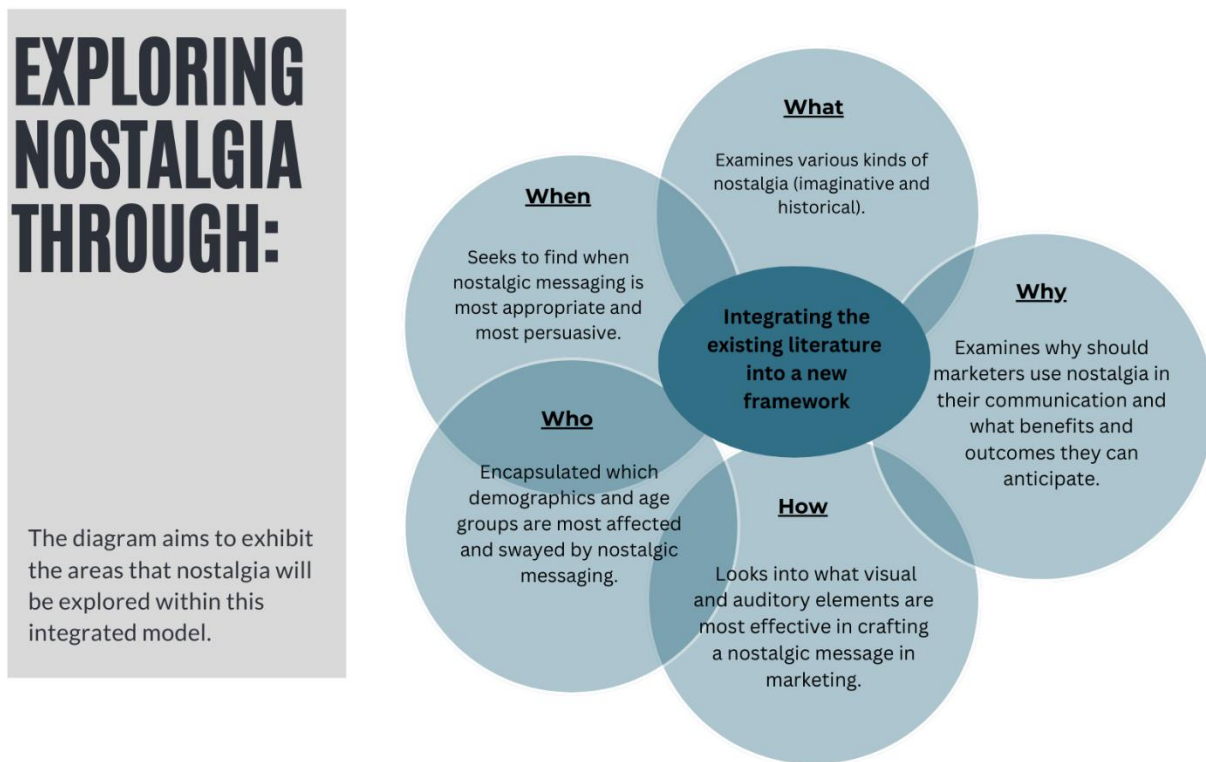
Nostalgia is not a new concept in marketing but rather one that has evolved over the years. Historically, nostalgia has been utilized in movies, theater, music, entertainment, and other fields, including advertising and marketing, to evoke a sentimental and romanticized longing for the past (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019). This affectionate remembrance typically focuses on a time or place with happy personal connections that create the re-living and re-feeling of that spent moment. It is a complex emotion that can simultaneously evoke feelings of warmth, happiness, sadness, and melancholy (Song et al., 2024). While individuals often feel nostalgic for a memory they have experienced, an individual can also feel nostalgic for a time and era that they have never experienced or been a part of. This latter phenomenon falls under the category of imaginative past (Stern, 1992). Within this reminiscent desire, an individual is longing for a fantasized place and time, one that only existed in imagination. Thus, nostalgia can be categorized into two categories: personal nostalgia and imaginative nostalgia. Like fear and humor, nostalgia provides a powerful emotional motivation for behavior and can therefore be a leveraging point for marketers (Rutherford, 2011).

The effects of nostalgia go beyond feeling, and can also play a role in making purchases and perception of a brand. Since the 1950s, advertisers and marketing experts have begun incorporating nostalgia into their work. The use of nostalgia in marketing has significantly increased throughout the recent decades (Brown et al., 2003). Over time, the portrayal of nostalgic sentiments has evolved (Stern, 1992) and marketers have been able to use it to form an emotional connection with consumers (Jones, 2014). Although many companies employ nostalgia in their marketing strategies (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003),

knowledge about the influence of nostalgia proneness on consumer behavior is limited (Özhan & Talih Akkaya, 2021). Most significantly, research on nostalgia is fragmented and difficult to navigate as the effects of nostalgia are scattered in various separate studies. (Kantola, 2018). Research on nostalgia is disjointed and does not provide sufficient guidance as to how it should be implemented in practice.

Therefore, this paper seeks an answer to “how marketers can strategically tap into the power of nostalgia in marketing using existing literature,” via an integrative review of nostalgia in marketing and advertising. Through exploring the discourse community and works within the marketing realm, the integration of the existing literature will provide a new framework, based on five questions that may guide marketers wishing to use nostalgia in their communications. This new integrated model will lead to new implications from the existing literature and create a synergy in which marketers can develop a better understanding of how nostalgia can be used. As shown in the diagram below, this paper will explore the who, what, when, how, and why to explore nostalgia marketing in a deeper glance.

Figure 1: Integrative Guiding Framework for Using Nostalgia in Marketing Practice



What

Nostalgia marketing leverages the emotional power of memories, evoking a longing for the past to create a compelling connection with consumers (Stern, 1992). This strategy can be broadly divided into two categories: historical and imaginative nostalgia marketing (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). Historical nostalgia marketing taps into genuine, collective memories of past eras. This approach appeals to consumers who lived through these times, providing them with a sentimental journey of remembering memories and lived experiences (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019). Imaginative nostalgia marketing, on the other hand, crafts an idealized or fantasized version of the past, even if the target audience never directly experienced it (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023). This form

of nostalgia appeals to younger generations who yearn for the charm and perceived authenticity of a past they know only through media.

While both forms of nostalgia marketing can be powerful, their effectiveness often varies by demographic. Historical nostalgia tends to resonate more strongly with older consumers who have direct memories of the eras being evoked (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007). Conversely, imaginative nostalgia can attract younger audiences who seek a sense of connection to an idealized past, providing them with a comforting escape and a way to experience a version of history that feels new (Joseph, 2023). In imaginative nostalgia, consumers have room to fantasize and create a version of a past that feels utopian and can feel bonded to that fantasy.

Historical Nostalgia

Advertisers began using nostalgia, both historical and imaginative, to create compelling stories that resonate with consumers (Stern, 1992). Within historical nostalgia, the consumer was being targeted to miss a time that the individual had experienced in their lifetime. Within historical nostalgia, consumers were faced with the desire to retreat from contemporary life by returning to a time in the distant past that often seemed superior to the present (Stern, 1992). Many brands use historical nostalgia to create an emotional appeal to their target audience. An example of this phenomenon is seen in one of Liberty Mutual's advertisements ([YouTube Link](#)), which starts with the line, "*Research shows people remember commercials with nostalgia,*" and the video ad showcases a 90s Christmas-decorated home to also create a nostalgic feeling and image in the eyes of consumers. The next scene follows with the line, "*Here's one that will really take you back...*" and then showcases a kid opening a wrapped gift under the

Christmas tree shot with a lens of a 1990s HandyCam camcorder (Gianatasio, 2020). The vintage look of the house furniture, and Christmas tree, and the faded colors make a bold nostalgic statement and especially speak to the Millennials and some Gen X consumers who in the 90s were kids or young teenagers and have sentimental memories and feelings from their adolescent years celebrating Christmas.

Given that Gen X and Millennials are current home buyers, this ad speaks to them and employs personal historical nostalgia. In this example, a “sentimentalized 'home' of one's childhood [is presented], and recollected in adult life as the font of warmth, security, and love” (Stern, 1992). Another example of historical nostalgia is Apple’s Cookie Monster commercial advertising the iPhone 6 ([YouTube Link](#)). Although this ad aims to showcase the touchless and hands-free features of the iPhone 6, the ad immediately brings memories of Sesame Street. A survey conducted on individuals who saw this commercial, reflected that with 4.5% of the survey participants shared this ad on social media platforms. The participants also expressed feelings of “happiness, hilarity, warmth and nostalgia” after viewing this ad, which highlights how participants embraced the nostalgia of this commercial (Unruly, 2016). The survey results also showcased that 49% of the survey participants expressed a desire to find out more about the iPhone 6, and 52% of participants intended to purchase it after watching the commercial (Unruly, 2016). This ad testifies to the power of nostalgia marketing and the impact it can have on consumers. Through fostering such a connection between their memories and the product being advertised, consumers form a nostalgic bond with the brand or product (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003).

Imaginative Nostalgia

Imaginative nostalgia, on the other hand, is about an unlived period or a fantasized time that consumers were not a part of but could relate to (Merchant, 2012). Imaginative nostalgia encapsulates the idea of feeling longing for an era, or atmosphere, that one has never personally experienced before, except in imagination (Stern, 1992). The underlying motivation of this kind of nostalgia is not necessarily to relive the past but rather to reintegrate gratifying elements of past experiences into the present (De Brigard, 2020). Within this kind of nostalgia, marketers aim to distill “feeling nostalgia [in consumers] for a time one didn’t actually live through” (De Brigard, 2020). This type of nostalgia often arises from exposure to old artifacts that the consumer has never seen before, or one that has been only witnessed in the realm of mystery and fairytales. These representations of fantasy can create a vivid, fictional sense of what life was like during that time, or instill a desire to live in that romanticized world. Stimulating consumer empathy with such a fictive past leads to imagining a golden past associated with the brands and products (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019).

Given the power of mythical creatures to tap into consumer’s feelings of nostalgia, many brands employ fairytale-like characters and stories in their commercials. An example of this can be seen in Amazon’s Rapunzel commercial ([YouTube Link](#)) which flashbacks to the well-known German fairytale story (Davis, 2021). Through displaying Rapunzel, her long hair, her iconic tower, and unique attire, which all resemble Disney’s fantasy cartoons, Amazon aims to engage with consumers through their power of imagination. Given that Rapunzel is an old folkloric fairytale that many

consumers have heard of, Amazon leverages imaginative nostalgia to forge an emotional connection with consumers.

This essence of fantasy is also visible in a commercial produced by Spotify. In this advertisement ([YouTube Link](#)), characters from the "1984 fantasy film "The Never Ending Story," are showcased to tap into consumer's imaginative nostalgia. Through the presence of characters Falkor the Luck Dragon (an imaginary creature) and Atreyu, Spotify taps into the collective imaginative nostalgia of its audience. The flying dragon in the dreamy and ethereal clouds brings back feelings of reminiscence for fairy tales. This ad also speaks to consumers who grew up with the iconic fantasy film, which is the usage of both historical and imaginative nostalgia simultaneously. Another example of imaginative nostalgia is McDonald's "Are We There Yet?" commercial ([YouTube Link](#)) which incorporates elements and themes from the well-known novel and movie series Harry Potter. In this example, consumers are faced with a blend of historical and imaginative nostalgia. Although themes and concepts in Harry Potter are ethereal and magical, consumers have lived the experience of reading the novels and watching the movie series. Within this ad, consumers see the moving pictures of a magazine, the radio turning on and off on its own and speaking with a British accent, a pigeon speaking and following a moving car (like the owls did in the Harry Potter movie) which all create a sense of imaginative nostalgia for the audience. These notions make this commercial unique since consumers undergo an eccentric experience of feeling historical and imaginative nostalgia simultaneously.

How

Various visual and auditory factors play a role in stirring nostalgic emotions in individuals. By tapping into these sensory receptors, marketers effectively create a sense of nostalgia in their work. Nostalgia can be demonstrated in many ways and forms, from using vintage fonts and familiar old music to incorporating retro visual elements like period-specific clothing and colors. These techniques help evoke memories and emotions associated with the past, making products feel safer, more appealing, and more meaningful to consumers. The following sections provide insight into some of these key elements, highlighting how they contribute to nostalgia-driven marketing strategies.

Typography

Along with other visual cues that can signal the essence of nostalgia to consumers, fonts can also go beyond aesthetics and play a pivotal role in shaping how consumers perceive a brand. Marketing researchers Kulczynski & Hook (2023) have conducted seven studies of A/B testing of visual ads with different fonts (one being a modern font, and the other being a vintage, old-looking font). Within these studies, Kulczynski & Hook (2023) aimed to examine consumers' preferences towards nostalgia and vintage fonts. The results of these studies indicated a significantly greater preference for old fonts in comparison to new and modern fonts on different advertising and packaging. The results of the seven studies served as evidence that typography can be a strategic tool for marketers to create emotional connections with consumers and enhance perceptions of product safety through vintage (i.e., nostalgic) fonts. Vintage typography can be a crucial brand element that shapes brand meaning, consumer brand memory, and perceptions (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023).

In addition, vintage fonts on fictitious vegetarian health food brand packaging, pharmacy medication packaging, and even cosmetics product packaging presented to test groups signaled positive consumer perceptions and behaviors. These positive notions indicated that vintage typography can enhance perceptions of product safety, leading to positive effects on brand attitude, purchase intention, and willingness to pay (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023). Another point that nostalgic typography highlights is vintage anemoia, a unique form of vicarious nostalgia. This describes a consumer's emotional connection to the past and appreciation for the aesthetics, fashion, styles, design, and cultural elements associated with vintage cues (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023).

Via typographic symbolism, marketers can use retro-marketing and retro-branding, which revitalizes old marketing communications and integrates them into contemporary contexts. This approach involves not only resurrecting old logos, fonts, and design elements but also tapping into nostalgic themes and sentiments that resonate with target audiences (Kulczynski & Hook, 2023). By leveraging familiar visual cues from the past, such as vintage packaging or retro advertisements, marketers can evoke feelings of nostalgia and create a sense of connection with consumers.

Music

Music is also another weapon that marketers and advertisers can use to create nostalgia for consumers. The relevance of music in nostalgia marketing is significant, as it plays a crucial role in influencing consumer preferences (Davies et al., 2022). The rise of nostalgia in music was first, pinpointed by Spotify after a significant interest in nostalgic music content. After seeing this rise of nostalgic music in people's playlists, brands have started leveraging old music to build authentic connections with their

audience (Spotify Editorial Team, 2019). Data has shown that music acts as a trigger stimulus to remember the past, and those sensory triggers play a crucial role in evoking nostalgia and engaging the audience (Spotify Editorial Team, 2019). Conducted research by Spotify (Spotify Editorial Team, 2019) additionally, highlighted that three in four people expressed more trust in brands and products that made them feel nostalgic.

The relation between age, nostalgia, and music preferences is crucial for marketers in developing effective and targeted nostalgia marketing strategies. To explore these relations, a study of consumers aged 18–84 was done, in which participants were exposed to 30-second excerpts of 34 songs from the Billboard Top 10 charts spanning from 1950 to 2016. Within the study, participants were asked to rate their preferences on an 11-point scale. The results revealed that individuals preferred music from their mid-to-late teens most, and less so music released earlier or later in their lives (Davies et al., 2022). This highlighted the importance of considering generational differences in music preferences when targeting specific consumer groups. Moreover, the study confirms that preferences for popular music peak during early adolescence or mid-to-late teens, suggesting that nostalgia for music from this period is a significant factor in music preferences (Davies et al., 2022). These findings can be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of nostalgia marketing campaigns by aligning music choices with the nostalgic preferences of specific age demographics.

Another study indicated that when marketers used old yet familiar songs in their advertisements, they received positive consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Chou & Lien, 2014). A study done by Chou and Lien (2014) examined consumers' responses to nostalgic and old songs being included on advertisements versus new songs. The

results showed that consumers had a greater preference towards old nostalgic songs. In those advertisements, if the lyrics of the old songs related to the product or service being advertised it further positively affected consumer attitudes towards the product, and purchase intention, suggesting a closer match between nostalgic lyrics and product attributes can enhance advertising effectiveness (Chou & Lien, 2014). This signals that even in employing music nostalgia marketers need to pay attention to the content of the audio-recording to maximize the positive nostalgic effect. This study also suggested that nostalgia advertising can be effective across different consumer demographics, including young undergraduates, providing a fresh strategy for targeting youth markets amidst common advertising clutter (Chou & Lien, 2014). This notion relates to imaginative nostalgia, and how young consumers who had not heard an old music track in their adolescence can still experience nostalgia although they don't directly have memories of listening to that song (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019).

Several brands have effectively utilized nostalgic music in their marketing campaigns. For instance, GAP's "Archive Reissue - Logo Remix" campaign combined the old and new by reimagining its iconic logo and using remixed old hits by contemporary artists. Within this advertisement, the music created a musical time travel experience that curated personalized playlists based on different eras from its advertising history (Gap, 2018). Taylor Swift's *Red (Taylor's Version)* is another example of tapping into consumer's auditory memory and nostalgia. Via the re-release of her 2012 album *Red*, she was merely just marketing her album; but also marketing nostalgia to her listeners (Innerfield, 2023). In this example, Taylor Swift is using her younger self, and the emotions her listeners underwent when listening to the music for the first time and

leveraging those positive associations as a way of marketing nostalgia to them (Innerfield, 2023). The number of streams of this album since it was released, testifies to consumers' preference for familiar re-mastered songs (Jagwani, 2021). Although consumers were not listening to an entirely new song, they enjoyed being immersed by the nostalgia the re-mastered album offered them.

Visuals

Visuals are the first notion that will grab a consumer's attention and serve as a determining factor for marketers and advertisers to evoke nostalgia. Illustrations, colors, film quality, and clothing of the characters of an advertisement can all serve to evoke nostalgic sentiments (Saxum, 2023). Ads that are shot with vintage lenses and purposefully shot with a low film quality, grab consumers' attention (Russell, 2023). These ads showcase nostalgic qualities at first glance. Examples of ads that adhere to vintage lenses include Adobe's *Joy of Sketching* and Amazon's *"Sweatermen" Holiday Campaign*. Adobe's *Joy of Sketching* decided to pay homage to famous painter Bob Ross, and is shot with a vintage lens in an attempt to re-create Bob Ross's painting shows that aired in the early 80s and mid-90s. Every detail including Bob Ross's style and attire match the era in which the Bob Ross painting show was aired (Hesterberg, 2023). After watching this ad consumers would think about the memories and experience of watching the Bob Ross show and feel the past.

Another example that employs the same practice is Amazon's *Sweatermen*. Within this advertisement, Amazon is not only leveraging the nostalgia of the '90s but also incorporating the vintage charm of the '60s in the vintage film quality it has used for creating the ad (Afaqs, 2023). In this ad, Amazon is aiming to appeal to both young and

old consumers simultaneously. The video utilizes a grainy appearance to mimic the vintage quality of old camera technology, offering viewers a nostalgic experience reminiscent of a past era. The furniture and designed sets immerse audiences into the ambiance of a '60s sitcom or variety show. The characters' wardrobe and attire are reflective of 1960s fashion, accurately capturing the essence of the era's style. Whether in tailored suits or vibrant dresses, the wardrobe selections enhance the authenticity of the setting (Afqas, 2023). Within this commercial, Amazon pays careful attention to the setting, furniture, color scheme, and character attire to re-create the past to enhance nostalgia.

This careful attention to the colors and attire of the characters can also be seen in other ads. The choice of color in commercials can further deepen nostalgic resonance, particularly warm hues like red, yellow, and orange (Russell, 2013). Bacardi's 2012 ad series employs warm hue colors in its aesthetics, in addition to an old typography opening font title (Hesterberg, 2023). While the ad aims to mimic the late-1950s, all characters in the ad are dressed in old attire and have vintage accessories. Blending all of these visual elements makes Bacardi's ad one that drives consumers to feel nostalgic for the past, even if they have not lived and experienced that era.

Who

Humans are complex creatures with distinct personalities and compound feelings, due to their upbringing and experiences they perceive the world around them differently, and this also goes for their perception of nostalgia. The effectiveness of nostalgia marketing varies across different age groups and personalities due to the unique experiences and cultural nuances that shape each generation. Generational age gaps also

shape differences in the way a generation goes about their hobbies, leisure, and spending habits (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007). What evokes fond memories for one group of demographic may not resonate with another because of their differences. Studies have indicated that certain individuals are characterized by a tendency or proneness towards experiencing nostalgia, meaning that they tend to experience nostalgic bonding more than others (Holbrook, 1993a, 1994). It is therefore important to understand each age group's reactions to nostalgia and nostalgia marketing.

A survey about nostalgia across different generations indicated that millennials and Gen Z portray the most nostalgic feelings. Gen Z and millennials exhibit a notable inclination towards nostalgia, with a significant portion expressing a preference for thinking about the past rather than the future. Specifically, 15% of Gen Z and 14% of millennials demonstrate this sentiment, indicating a strong attachment to nostalgia and the old days. Moreover, these generational cohorts are also driving nostalgia within the media landscape, with 50% of Gen Z and 47% of millennials expressing nostalgia for various forms of media. While nostalgia is present across all age groups to some extent, it is particularly pronounced among the younger generations, underscoring their significant influence in shaping contemporary trends related to nostalgia. This longing for the past becomes more evident when data showcases 37% of Gen Z experiences nostalgia for the 90s, a decade they have not lived through (Harlow, 2023).

Gen Z's desire for nostalgia extends beyond mere sentimentality; it even affects their fashion choices, media consumption, and preferences in music. A substantial 54% of Gen Z individuals appreciate vintage clothing styles, contributing to the resurgence of 90s and early 00s fashion trends (Harlow, 2023). Gen Z's nostalgic impulses have

influenced their media consumption habits, with movies, TV shows, and music serving as potent triggers for nostalgic reverie among 46% of consumers across various demographics (Harlow, 2023). This nostalgia-driven phenomenon manifests in the resurgence of classic Disney films remade in live-action or realistic animation formats, as well as the release of sequels. Additionally, television series like *Stranger Things*, set in the 1980s, captivate audiences, particularly among Gen Z, who find novelty in the portrayal of a pre-internet era (Harlow, 2023). Millennials are the second leading generation in terms of nostalgia proneness. The sense of appreciation for nostalgia is a coping mechanism for millennials who grew up torn between cultural disposition, tradition and modernity, and conservatism and progressivism (Sharma, 2023).

With these data showing that millennials and Gen Z portray most nostalgia about the old days, the sections ahead will cover nostalgia marketing and advertising across these two generations.

Age Groups

Millennials.

Studies have indicated that millennials are most prone to be positively influenced by nostalgic marketing. Born between 1981-1996, they have high spending power making them an important target audience for businesses, spending about \$600 billion each year in the US alone (Jones, 2023). In addition to their financial stability, millennials feel nostalgic about their own past, which is linked to growing up with rapid social, technological, and economic changes. Millennials yearn for their childhood and adolescent ages, and marketers have seen this gap as a valuable strategy to connect with millennials, who are considered the most nostalgic generation. Additionally, millennials

are the only generation who have experienced the age of the internet and technology, but also remember a time before smartphones and social media. Because of this dual experience, millennials are an ideal target audience for marketers who aspire to blend the old with the new (Jones, 2023).

To further prove this claim, surveys were conducted among millennials to examine the relationship between the frequency of thinking about childhood and nostalgia, and brand/product liking (Moniek Lammersma & Wortelboer, 2017). Results showed that millennials experienced nostalgia after they saw ads with nostalgic sentiments and also reported enjoying them because they were reminded of their younger selves. Additionally, they reported a positive brand attitude and enhanced purchase intention after seeing the nostalgic advertisement (Moniek Lammersma & Wortelboer, 2017).

The appeal of nostalgic marketing is evident in the resurgence of trends from the past, such as the success of retro-themed products and experiences. Brands are tapping into this nostalgia with successful campaigns, such as Pokémon Go and the Nintendo NES Classic Mini. Nintendo and Pokémon have capitalized on nostalgic sentiment by leveraging their brand names and products from the '90s era, effectively tapping into millennials' nostalgia. For instance, the launch of Pokémon Go in 2016 brought the franchise into the digital age, targeting particularly millennials who grew up collecting Pokémon cards and watching the TV show (Jones, 2023). The popularity of this game among millennials surged, and the *New York Times* called the game, *Pokémon Go, Millennials' First Nostalgia Blast* (Hardy, 2022). Similarly, the release of the Nintendo NES Classic Mini console offered a compact, modernized version of the classic gaming

system, transporting millennials back to their cherished gaming experiences from childhood (Jones, 2023).

Data about millennials' relationship with nostalgia indicates that brands can capitalize on millennials' nostalgia by relaunching past products, incorporating nostalgic elements in promotions, and designing retail environments that evoke sentimental memories. Social media marketers also have an opportunity to engage millennials through nostalgic campaigns, tapping into their early-onset nostalgic activities online. (Moniek Lammersma & Wortelboer, 2017) While non-nostalgic advertising may be more effective in certain contexts, nostalgic advertising still shapes brand perceptions and purchase intentions, especially when used judiciously to create distinct brand narratives (Moniek Lammersma & Wortelboer, 2017). Ultimately, understanding when and how to deploy nostalgia in advertising campaigns tailored to millennials is paramount, given their proclivity for nostalgic proneness.

Gen Z.

As mentioned above in the imaginative nostalgia section, people can feel nostalgia for times that they have not experienced. This is the case for Gen Z which includes individuals born between 1997 through 2012. The essence of nostalgia is visible in the lives of Gen Z, in terms of their desire for throwback memories, and to revisit old days (Joseph, 2023). Nostalgia marketing's effectiveness on Gen Z, stems from its ability to evoke a sense of comfort and familiarity in an increasingly uncertain world. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, like many generations, Gen Z has returned to the past to seek solace in memories of simpler times (Joseph, 2023). Gaming culture, especially during the pandemic, has significantly contributed to the nostalgia wave, fostering emotional

connections and shared experiences. The surge of playing games during the pandemic allowed Gen Z to experience classic games and consoles, creating an opportune moment for brands to leverage nostalgia to connect with this younger generation (Joseph, 2023).

TikTok also plays a vital role in the wave of nostalgia among Gen Z (Joseph, 2023). Gen Z, being the first generation to grow up with the internet, has easy access to vast amounts of information from the past. The rise of the internet and social media has allowed for rapid sharing and remixing of cultural ideas, leading to a new form of nostalgia-based marketing (Caballero, 2020). On platforms like TikTok, which thrive on trends and challenges, users often revisit and reinterpret older trends, fashion styles, and cultural references. This process triggers nostalgia not just for the original content but also for the experiences associated with it, even if the users did not directly live through those times. Gen Z feels linked to an emotional attachment to historical events or cultural phenomena that occurred before their time but have been romanticized through stories and media (Ergin, 2019).

This notion triggers imaginative nostalgia among this generation, who have not experienced the old days but are re-creating them as if they were a part of those days in the first place. Via TikTok which Gen Z predominantly uses, allows room to remix old songs, imitate iconic movie scenes, or revive viral challenges from the past. Via TikTok, Gen Z delves into nostalgia and participates in and reinterprets historical trends, creating a unique blend of old and new. As a result, certain trends from just a few months ago can become subjects of nostalgia, a phenomenon known as 'nowstalgia (Joseph, 2023). Bridging the generational gap and creating a sense of familiarity that resonates deeply with the audience (Joseph, 2023).

Through this approach of imaginative nostalgia and vicarious approach, marketers are creating interactive campaigns that invite customers to experience the nostalgia of a specific time period. They are building trust and a personalized connection to the brand “which doesn't rely on personal experiences but rather on idealized versions of past eras” (Caballero, 2020). Examples of this kind of nostalgia marketing to Gen Z is visible in Urban Outfitters' promotion of cassette players and tapes. By romanticizing the tactile experience of listening to music on cassette tapes from the 1980s, Urban Outfitters taps into Gen Z's longing for authenticity and tangible connections in a digital age. Similarly, Netflix's collaboration with Coca-Cola to resurrect New Coke as a tie-in with the third season of "Stranger Things" demonstrates how experiential marketing can bridge the gap between past and present, offering Gen Z consumers immersive experiences that evoke the nostalgia of a bygone era (Caballero, 2020). Through a blend of retro aesthetics and modern consumption experiences, marketers are targeting Gen Z and forging connections that drive brand loyalty and positive engagement among the younger demographic (Joseph, 2023).

When

As memories are the binding core of reminiscence, nostalgia marketing is most effective at the time of the year when individuals experience moments that enable them to create heartfelt memories. Such moments usually take place when individuals are surrounded by meaningful symbiotics, some of those moments are major holidays. For example, Christmas is a time when consumers often think about their younger self, and the old days, and brands and some take advantage of this nostalgic feeling (O'Barr, 2006). Coca-Cola is an example of leveraging nostalgia in commercials during the

Christmas season (Weatherford, 2019). Coca-Cola employs essential Christmas elements in their advertisements to tap into consumer's feelings of nostalgia. Through using Santa Claus in the Christmas commercials, Coca-Cola aims to resurrect a character that lives in many consumers' memories of childhood. The approach of using nostalgic sentiments and brand storytelling has led to Coca-Cola's success in marketing their brand and associating it with Christmas and Santa (Weatherford, 2019). Coca-Cola has used Christmas nostalgic ads since the 1930s and has shaped a habit for consumers to anticipate seeing Santa and nostalgic Christmas commercials during the holiday season.

In 2019, a survey was conducted to measure Coca-Cola's success in planting the seed of nostalgia in customers' minds through their holiday commercials. The survey results demonstrated that 91% of respondents associated Coca-Cola with the image of a portly Santa Claus, in contrast to other brands that barely registered in this association (Weatherford, 2019). This strong linkage is a testament to Coca-Cola's consistent and effective use of nostalgia marketing communications in the holiday season. These repeatedly showcased nostalgic images and messages in advertisements, and product packaging, over the years have been successful.

The effectiveness of Coca-Cola's nostalgia marketing is further evidenced by the meaning that consumers place on the brand. More than 70% of respondents directly linked Coca-Cola with themes such as Santa Claus, nostalgic, old-fashioned, the holiday season, and Christmas. This indicates that Coca-Cola's strategic focus on nostalgia has successfully cemented these associations in consumers' perceptions. The enduring popularity of Coca-Cola's Christmas campaigns highlights the brand's ability to evoke

warm, nostalgic feelings that positively influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Weatherford, 2019).

Another brand that knows the value of tapping into consumer's nostalgia during the holiday season is John Lewis. The British brand has been famous for its Christmas advertisements and implementation of nostalgia in its holiday advertisements since 2007. John Lewis aims to remind consumers of the excitement they felt about Christmas as children and bring out "childhood delight" while positioning John Lewis as the place to buy (Marketing Week, 2009). Christmas advertisements have become an annual tradition that signals the beginning of the festive countdown in the U.K. John Lewis's ads are crafted to evoke deep nostalgia, reminding viewers of cherished Christmas memories, which enhances their emotional connection to the brand (Jarboe, 2021).

John Lewis's Christmas ads have generally been very successful in terms of views and engagements on YouTube. For example, the 2011 advert, "The Long Wait," garnered 8.3 million views and 43,000 engagements, while the 2015 advert, "#ManOnTheMoon," peaked with 30.4 million views and 163,000 engagements (Jarboe, 2021). The broader context of consumer behavior also reflects a waning interest in traditional nostalgic adverts (Jarboe, 2021). Through reinforced nostalgia appeals in their Christmas commercials and repetition, John Lewis has been able to generate consumer interaction and use Christmas time as a leverage point to grow their brand.

In addition to Christmas and the holiday season, uncertain times seem to be another ideal temporal context for nostalgia marketing. For example, the surge of nostalgia during COVID-19 presented an opportunity for brands to innovate products and services that cater to consumers' emotional needs. In a time when remote work and

digitalization have transformed the workplace, it also affected the purchasing power of consumers (Sharma & Luhar 2022). In such a stressful time, individuals were experiencing insecurity and fear for what the future held for them.

Amidst all this uncertainty lay the comfort and familiarity of nostalgia. In a time when all the world was surrounded by uncertainty and doubt, marketers and advertisers turned to nostalgia (Monllos, 2021). Sharma and Luhar (2022) emphasized the role of invoking nostalgia to counter negative emotions like loneliness and anxiety which were felt across all age groups during the pandemic. Nostalgic ads that ran during the pandemic provided room to transport individuals to simpler and happier times, such as childhood or memorable life events (Sharma & Luhar 2022). This emotional connection was leveraged to sell products and services, especially when people were spending more time at home due to lockdowns.

Another example that testifies to this insight and proves that nostalgic advertisements were widely used and successful in attracting consumers during the pandemic is from Turkey (Ergin, 2019). TV commercials with retro pieces of music in Turkey during the pandemic resonated with consumers' nostalgic sentiments (Ergin, 2019). In a time when all individuals were simmering with uncertainty, nostalgic appeals brought familiarity to consumers.

Additional research done by researchers Xia and Wang (2021) demonstrates that disruptive events, such as COVID-19 or social unrest, significantly heighten desires for nostalgia among individuals. This increased need for nostalgia, in turn, positively influences consumer behavior in response to nostalgia marketing by enhancing their purchase intentions, particularly for new products. The studies illustrate that when

individuals are reminded of their mortality or face collective threats, they tend to seek comfort and meaning through nostalgic experiences. This emotional response creates a favorable context for marketing strategies that leverage nostalgic elements to promote new products (Xia & Wang, 2021). This explains why nostalgia marketing is particularly effective during times of collective or personal threats.

The mechanism behind this effect is the search for meaning triggered by nostalgic feelings. When people experience nostalgia, they often reflect on meaningful past experiences, which can drive their desire to find similar meanings in the present and future (Xia et al., 2021). This desire can be effectively harnessed by marketers to promote new products, as the novelty of these products can fulfill consumers' search for meaning. The research findings indicate that although consumers may generally show higher purchase intentions for old or retro products during nostalgic moments, the unique combination of nostalgia and the perceived innovativeness of new products can create a compelling motivation for purchase. Therefore, nostalgia marketing, particularly when aligned with the introduction of new products, can be a powerful tool for businesses during times of social or personal upheaval (Xia et al., 2021).

Although the repeat of tragic and unprecedented events like Covid-19 pandemic are unfortunate and should be avoided in most contexts, it is important for marketers to understand that consumers seek the comfort of nostalgia amidst uncertain times. As researchers indicated, consumers enjoy nostalgia and companies can develop nostalgic-themed products or experiences that evoke positive memories and emotions. By aligning with consumers' nostalgic desires, brands can differentiate themselves in the market and drive customer engagement, especially during times of stress and change (Ergin, 2019)

Why

In addition to the mental effects of nostalgia on consumers, nostalgia affects consumer behavior in terms of brand attitude and purchasing intention (Ozhan, 2021). Nostalgic advertising seeks to influence both brand perception and purchasing behavior, aiming to forge strong connections with consumers and cultivate favorable brand perceptions and purchase intentions. Studies have consistently shown that nostalgic cues in advertising evoke positive perceptions and attitudes toward brands, contributing to increased purchase intention, regardless of product type (Moniek Lammersma & Wortelboer, 2017). This intergenerational appeal of nostalgia allows marketing campaigns to strategically use nostalgic elements to appeal to a broad audience, tailoring messages that evoke a collective sense of longing for 'the good old days' (Engin, 2019).

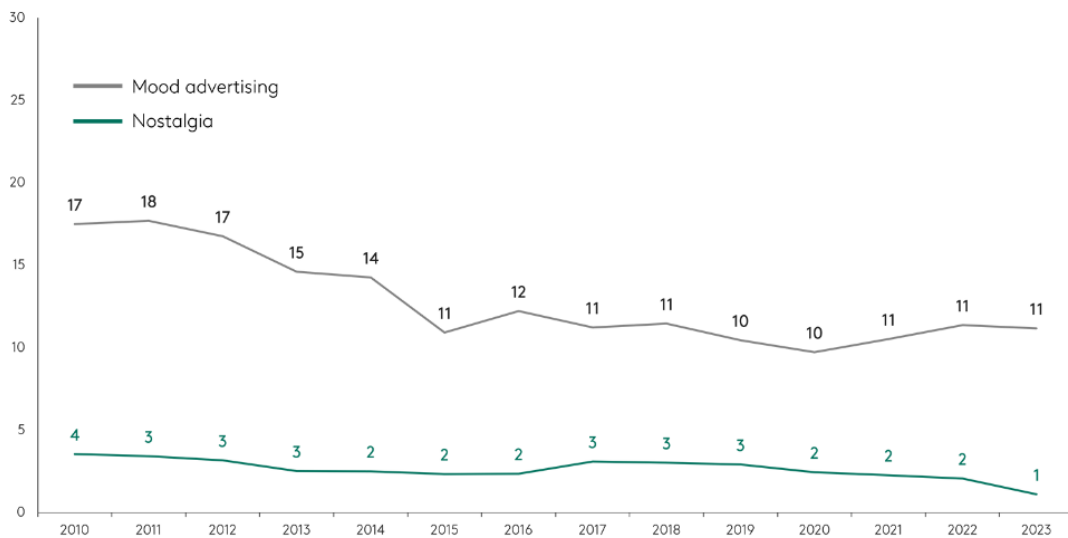
These effects have the ability to make consumers feel closer to the brand and product by evoking personal and historical memories, which positively influence brand attitude and purchase intention (Ozhan, 2021). This connection can further enhance brand loyalty, as consumers are more likely to repeatedly gravitate towards products and services that remind them of cherished times (Jones, 2024). For instance, a consumer who associates a particular brand with positive childhood experiences may develop a stronger attachment to that brand, translating into repeated purchases and enduring brand loyalty (Ozhan, 2021). This intergenerational appeal of nostalgia means that marketing campaigns can strategically use nostalgic elements to appeal to a broad audience, tailoring messages that evoke a collective sense of longing for the good old days.

As Figure 2 displays, nostalgia is underused in marketing and advertising despite its significant effects on consumers (Jones, 2024). Many brands overlook the potential of

nostalgic elements to create strong emotional connections and foster brand loyalty. By incorporating nostalgia into their campaigns, marketers can evoke fond memories and positive associations from the past, which can significantly enhance consumer engagement and purchasing intentions. This strategy can make brands appear more authentic and trustworthy, often leading to a perception of higher quality and value. Additionally, nostalgia has a broad appeal that can resonate with multiple generations, allowing marketers to reach a wider audience and create a collective sense of longing for 'the good old days.' Therefore, leveraging nostalgia effectively can differentiate brands, boost consumer loyalty, and ultimately drive sales, making it a powerful yet underutilized tool in the marketer's arsenal.

Figure 2: Usage of nostalgia in advertising

Nostalgia is under used in advertising



Source: Kantar Link database



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What Was Old Is New Again: The History of Nostalgia as a Buying Motive in Consumption

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